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How land nationalisation
will benefit householders...

[London]

[1887]

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Wallace, Alfred Russel, 1823-1913.

How land nationalisation will benefit house-
holders, labourers and mechanics. London, Land Nationalisation Society
1887.

7 p., 18 cm. 440 80
no. III Land nationalisation society tracts,

Vol. of pamphlets.

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TECHNICAL MICROFORM DATA

FILM SIZE: 35mm

REDUCTION RATIO: 9:1

IMAGE PLACEMENT: IA IIA IB IIB

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HOW LAND NATIONALISATION WILL BENEFIT HOUSEHOLDERS, LABOURERS, AND MECHANICS.

BY ALFRED R. WALLACE, LL.D., F.R.G.S.,

President of the Land Nationalisation Society.

"Is it to be credited that this crowding together of men in Houses dove-tailed into each other, with everything of nature—winds, flowers, verdure, the healthy smell of earth, shut out and replaced by a thousand miasms—is it, I say, to be credited that this is the normal condition of beings born with natural cravings for activity and pure air, with an intelligent eye for nature's manifold picturesquenesses, with bodies requiring to be exercised, no less than heads? The very necessity for drains tells against us. All manure was meant directly to nourish the land it accumulates on—not to pollute our streams and rivers. Cities as they now are, and must probably always be, are abscesses of nature. The soil and terrestrial space are not meant for the rearing of food only, but to be dwelt and moved about on—to be daily enjoyed in all the variety of wholesome sights, sounds, and odours they afford us." *

* On the Evils, Impolicy and Anomaly of Individuals being Landlords and Nations Tenants. By Robert Dick, M.D., London, 1886.

IT is a common but mistaken notion that to Nationalise the Land will only directly affect farmers and those who wish to be farmers, while most other classes will only be indirectly and remotely benefited by it. I therefore propose to show what great and direct benefits it will confer on the three classes named above, and, through them, on the whole community.

The great majority of men are householders, and those who live in towns, especially, suffer many evils which are directly due to the system of landlordism. Most town houses are badly built and inconvenient, with insufficient light and air, often packed together in narrow slices back to back, or squeezed into gloomy courts by the greed of landlords and speculators, in order to get the greatest possible number of cheap houses on the least possible quantity of leasehold land. Owing to the land monopoly that pervades the whole country, people are driven to live in these houses at exorbitant rents, and are subject to a continual increase of these rents whenever from any cause the neighbourhood is improved. A new street, or a public park, or a line of railway, is the occasion of a general raising of rents to benefit landlords who do not contribute a penny to their construction. If a man has a lease of his house, he is forced at the end of it to give it up to his landlord, without compensation for the improvements he may have made, or he is only allowed to renew it at an increased rent, besides doing expensive repairs and decorations, and often paying a heavy fine; and he is bound to accept these terms or be turned out, which to a tradesman with a local connection often means ruin. Owing to houses having been almost all built by speculators to sell at a profit, few persons can find a house such as they would like, but are forced to take whatever they can get.

Now the immediate effect of Nationalisation will be that every man will be able to escape this organised system of plunder and annoyance, by becoming the owner of his house and premises on the easiest terms. Suppose him to be a tradesman, shopkeeper, or other householder in a large town, occupying a house on a yearly tenancy, or having a short lease. The ground rent now payable to the ground landlord will henceforth be paid to the State by the occupier, just as he now pays his income tax. The house and premises will be fairly valued, and if the occupier cannot raise money to purchase them at once, arrangements will be made by which the Municipality will become the owner, and will either let it to him with the option of purchase, or will allow him to pay for it by means of a terminable annuity, as is now done by building societies, *but extending over a longer period, so that the*

total rent he will pay will hardly exceed the rent he has hitherto paid to his landlord. Every year's rent thus paid will give him a *property* in the house, which property will be transferable or saleable at any time; and he will, after the first year or two, be *virtually the owner*, and able to make any additions or improvements with as much confidence as if it was his own freehold. When the value of the house is finally paid, he will be in the position of a perpetual leaseholder from the State, at a ground rent subject to revision along with all other rents (but never separately) about three times in a century.

This is surely a great and immediate benefit which almost every householder will, sooner or later, receive. But we must also take into consideration that, just in proportion as the whole land of the country comes into possession of the State, and the annuities given in lieu of it drop off by the death of the annuitants,* all State taxes will be diminished and will ultimately be totally abolished; and among the first to go will be those vexatious interferences with trade caused by the Excise and Customs duties; so that, besides the freedom and security of being *owner of his own house*, he will be directly benefited by greatly-reduced taxation and complete freedom in his business. He will also derive important *indirect* benefits, as will be shown further on.

The Effects of Nationalisation on the Labourer and Mechanic in Rural Districts:—The greatest want of the labourer and mechanic living in the country or in small towns is to be able to get an acre or two of land at a fair rent and in secure possession, so that he may build a workshop or a cottage upon it if he likes, and be free from all interference by landlord, agent, or lawyer. For want of this many a man struggles vainly to earn an honest living, and when work for wages is slack is *forced* to be idle, though land that would well reward the labourer is lying half cultivated all around him.

Now, an essential part of our scheme of Land Nationalisation is, that every man can claim *as a right* (once in his life) to have such a piece of land allotted him, at its fair agricultural value; and, further, that he shall not be obliged to take any piece of land however unsuitable it may be to him, but

* *Vide* Postscript, p. 7.

shall be able to choose a piece *wherever most convenient to himself*, the only limit being that it must *adjoin some public road*, and shall not be in such a position as unnecessarily to annoy or inconvenience the farmer or other present occupier. The principle we maintain is, that the primary and the highest use of a nation's land is to provide healthy and happy homes for the greatest number of its people, and that *it should be the birthright of every British subject to have the use and enjoyment of a portion of his native land, with no unnecessary restrictions on that enjoyment other than that implied by the equal rights of others*. Unless such a right is given to our people, land will remain to a large extent the monopoly of the rich, even under nationalisation; for farms will be sold or transferred entire, and it will be nobody's interest to sell the tenant-right of small plots of land, except at exorbitant prices. If nationalisation is to be a reality everyone must have a fair opportunity of obtaining the use of some portion of the national land, and no method has yet been pointed out offering so many advantages to the community, and interfering so little with the large cultivators who have hitherto monopolised the soil, as a limited free-secution such as that here advocated. Of course a fixed percentage only of each farm would be allowed to be taken, but in the vicinity of towns the municipalities should have the power of buying all the agricultural land that there may be a demand for by the inhabitants.

The prospect of having such a plot of land, from which no landlord can turn him out, and in the possession of which he will be as secure and independent as any squire or farmer in the country, will certainly tend to make men sober and saving. Every shilling will be put by till enough money is got together to pay the occupier for his *tenant-right*, which on ordinary farm land will be a very trifling sum, and perhaps to build a hut or small cottage to begin with. Any agricultural labourer could take such a piece of land when he is 13 years old, and could save enough to build a small cottage and be able to marry by the time he is 23 or 25. The land would be cultivated and improved in his spare time; and days out of work would not as now be wasted, but would be spent on his own property, the produce of which, added to his wages, would soon mount up to a respectable sum. He

could grow vegetables, or fruit or flowers, or keep poultry or pigs, according to the demand of the neighbourhood, and without a penny of borrowed money might easily, bit by bit, get a comfortable cottage ready for his increasing family.

But this is only the beginning of the good he would get out of his land. Such a labourer would be much more independent than he can possibly be now, and would not be forced to accept any wages, however low, in order to keep himself and his family from the workhouse; and as the great body of labourers all over the country would be equally independent, wages must certainly rise considerably, *for they are only kept down to the present starvation-point by the fact that men are forbidden the means of working for themselves, and must work for others or starve*. With an acre of garden at the same rent paid for the same kind of land by the farmer; with his cottage on it built out of his own savings; and with wages all over the country as high as they are where they are now highest, the English labourer would be the pride and the strength of the country, instead of being, as now, its disgrace and its weakness. And the farmers would be equally benefited; for instead of a lot of tramps and scamps who cannot be trusted, they would have always at hand a body of industrious, honest and sober men, willing to do a good day's work for a good day's wages; and as such men would never go to the workhouse, the saving in poor rates and in general taxation would be so much clear gain to every householder.

The country mechanic or small shopkeeper would also find a piece of land of inestimable value, even if he did not at first want to live on it. There are many ways in which a man may benefit himself and employ his spare time or spare cash if he has land of his own on which he can put up a shed, or a workshop, or a stable, store materials, or keep a donkey or a pony, or a cow; while if fruit trees are planted they will grow into a valuable orchard with hardly any attention.

General Benefits which will be felt by all.—Perhaps even more important than the *direct* benefits in independence and in pocket which Nationalisation will give to every householder, are those *indirect advantages* which will accrue to him through the general well-being of the whole community. By

the free selection of land for homes, as here explained, a large mass of our population who now live as weekly tenants in back lanes and alleys of towns, or in rows of poor gardenless cottages in the country, whose unoccupied days are wasted in seeking work, and whose evenings and other spare hours are worse than wasted at the public-house—mainly because they have no profitable means of occupying them—will become the permanent occupiers of healthy homes, and *large producers of food*. These people will then earn (in addition to their regular wages) the many millions now paid to foreigners for imported eggs, poultry, bacon, apples, potatoes, and other articles, which every cottager with an acre or two of land will produce in his spare time with the help of his family; and all this extra money will be spent in the country, mostly on some manufacturers, and will thus benefit all other classes of labourers and shopkeepers.

But again, the free selection of land for dwellings will induce thousands of persons to reside in the country who are now compelled to live in towns. Every village will at once begin a process of natural growth, and this increased population of the country will afford outlets for thousands of shopkeepers, mechanics and others who now crowd our towns in ruinous competition. This outflow of the congested population of the towns will help those that remain in many ways. It will at once lower the rent of houses, raise wages, and also raise profits in all trades by the diminution of competition; while all will benefit by the diminution and final abolition of direct taxes and of Customs and Excise duties—by the saving of the cost of millions of paupers, who will become self-supporting and the creators of wealth—by the great increase of the general wealth owing to several millions of hands being employed in producing food during hours and days now wasted—by the enormous saving owing to the diminution of drunkenness and crime that will inevitably follow (as it always has followed) the free use of land by the people—and lastly, by the great economy and the benefit to health of the production of food for consumption in the immediate neighbourhood of the producer, instead of first carrying it some hundreds of miles into a great town and there re-distributing it to the country, which the present

system of exclusively large farms necessitates—a series of savings which, combined, will constitute an enormous gain, affecting, not a few individuals only, but every householder throughout the land. These great benefits will directly follow Nationalisation as proposed by our Society, and they serve to indicate the enormous magnitude of the evils produced by the MONOPOLY OF THE LAND.

[*Postscript*.—Acting on the suggestion of DR. WALLACE, made since this tract was written, the Land Nationalisation Society has approved of the method of compensation by means of State Land Bonds redeemable at par.

57, CHARING CROSS, S.W., August, 1887.]

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- To restore to all their natural right to use and enjoy their native land.
- To obtain for the NATION the revenue derived from its LAND.

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